

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE  
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 240122a

Monday 22.01.2024

## **Audience with members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican**

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the International Association of Journalists accredited to the Vatican.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Welcome, even though you are at home here! I am pleased: this is for me an opportunity to thank you, who are a bit like my travelling companions, for the work you carry out in informing readers, listeners and viewers on the activity of the Holy See. Journalists, media workers, photographers, producers: you are a community united by a mission. I know your passion, your love for what you report, your hard work. Many of you follow not only the Vatican, but also Italy, southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the countries you come from.

Being a journalist is a vocation, somewhat like that of a doctor, who chooses to love humanity by curing illnesses. In a certain sense, the journalist does likewise, choosing to touch personally the wounds of society and the world. It is a calling that emerges at a young age and which leads you to understanding, shedding light, and recounting. I wish for you to return to the roots of this vocation, to recall it, to remember the calling that unites you in such an important task. How much need to know and to tell on the one hand, and how much need to cultivate an unconditional love of truth on the other!

I would like to express gratitude not only for what you write and broadcast, but also for your constancy and patience in following day after day the news that arrives from the Holy See and the Church, reporting on an institution that transcends the “here and now”, and our own lives. As Saint Paul VI said, there is “fondness, esteem and trust for what you are and what you do” (*Address to representatives of the Italian and foreign press*, 29 June 1963). Thank you also for your sacrifices in following the Pope around the world and in working often

even on Sundays and feast days. I apologize for the times when the news concerning me in various ways has taken you away from your families, from playing with your children - this is very important; when I confess, I ask parents: "Do you play with your children?": it is one of the things a father and mother must always do, play with their children -, and from the time to spend with their husbands or wives.

Our meeting is an opportunity to reflect on the tiring job of the *vaticanista*, the Vatican expert, in recounting the journey of the Church, in building bridges of knowledge and communication instead of rifts of division and distrust (cf. Saint John XXIII, *Address to journalists on the occasion of the National Council of the Italian Press Federation*, 22 February 1963).

Who, then, is the *vaticanista*? In response, to borrow the words of one of your colleagues, who has recently celebrated his eightieth birthday and has travelled a great deal with the Popes. Talking about his work as a *vaticanista*, he defined it as a "a job that is fast to the point of being ruthless, twice as uncomfortable when applied to a high subject such as the Church, which the commercial media inevitably bring to their level [...] of the market". "In so many years of Vaticanism", he added, "I have learned the art of seeking and narrating stories of life, which is a way of loving humanity [...]. I have learnt humility. I have encountered many men of God who have helped me to believe and to remain human. So, I can only encourage those who want to venture into this journalistic specialization" (L. Accattoli, Preface to G. Tridente, *Diventare vaticanista. Informazione religiosa ai tempi del Web*, 2018, 5-7). Despite the difficulties, this is a beautiful encouragement: to love humanity, to learn humility.

Saint Paul VI, as soon as he was elected, in the months preceding the resumption of the Council, invited journalists who followed Vatican affairs to immerse themselves in the nature and spirit of the facts to which they dedicated their service. It - he said - "must not be guided, as sometimes happens, by the criteria that classify the things of the Church according to profane and political categories, which do not suit the things themselves, indeed often deform them, but must take into account what truly informs the life of the Church, namely her religious and moral aims and her characteristic spiritual qualities" (Address to the Representatives of the Press). I would like to add the delicacy that you so often have in speaking of scandals in the Church: there are some and many times I have seen in you a great delicacy, a respect, an almost, I say, "abashed" silence: thank you for this attitude.

Thank you for the effort you make to maintain this vision that is able to look behind appearances, to grasp the substance, that does not bend to the superficiality of stereotypes and preconceived formulas of the information-spectacle, which, in the difficult search for the truth, prefers the facile categorization of facts and ideas according to pre-established moulds. I encourage you to continue along this path that knows how to combine information with reflection, speaking with listening, discernment with love.

The same journalist I quoted argued that in the media environment "the *vaticanista*" will have to resist the native vocation of mass communication to manipulate the image of the Church, as much as and more than any other image of associated humanity. Indeed, the media tend to deform religious news. They deform it with both the high or ideological register and the low or spectacular register. The overall effect is a double deformation of the image of the Church: the first register tends to force it under a political guise, the second tends to relegate it to light news" (*Preface*).

It is not easy, but herein lies the greatness of the *vaticanista*, the subtlety of spirit that adds to journalistic skill. The beauty of your work around Peter is that of founding it on the solid rock of responsibility in truth, not on the fragile sands of gossip and ideological interpretations; that lies in not hiding reality and its miseries, not sugarcoating the tensions but at the same time not making unnecessary noise, rather striving to capture the essential, in the light of the nature of the Church. How much good this does to the People of God, to the simplest people, to the Church herself, who still has some way to go to communicate better: with witness, before words. Thank you very much for your work. One thing that pleases me is that I have learnt to know you by name; the great dean is here, and I greet her; the vice-dean, and so many of you whom I know by name... I thank you so much, you pray for me, I do it for you. I renew my thanks and bless you, your loved ones and your work. And, please, do not forget to pray for me!

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